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UNCLAS ROME 003200

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SUBJECT: ITALY: EXTENSION OF DEADLINE FOR BIOMETRIC
PASSPORTS FOR VISA WAIVER PROGRAM

REF: STATE 173398

1. Consul General informed Min. Adriano Benedetti, MFA Director General for Italians Abroad and Political Migration, July 26 that Congress had passed legislation granting a one-year extension of the Visa Waiver Program biometric passport requirement and that the bill had gone to President Bush for signature. Benedetti, who has been following the issue closely, said Italy was greatly appreciative of an extension, as implementation of the 2004 deadline would pose significant hardship to Italian travelers. Benedetti noted that Italy still hopes to put its biometric-enabled passport into general circulation by the end of 2005. As requested reftel, Consul General informed Benedetti by letter August 18 that President Bush had signed the legislation into law. She also passed on reftel's talking points in the form of a nonpaper.

2. Regarding possible confusion between the extension of the biometric deadline and the upcoming October 26 requirement for a machine-readable passport, during her discussion with Benedetti, the Consul General thanked the Ministry for its support of Mission Italy's outreach efforts to remind the many Italians who still have old-style passports that there will be no extension of that deadline. Those travelers and all children without passports of their own (most children are included in the passports of their parents) will either need new passports or a visa by that day.

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